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UNCLAS MUSCAT 000954

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STATE FOR NEA/ARP, NEA/IPA, AND EB/TPP/MTA  
STATE PASS USTR FOR J.BUNTIN  
USDOC FOR ITA C.OBERG

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: ETRD KBCT OPRC PREL IS MU

SUBJECT: OMAN REAFFIRMS NO ISRAELI BOYCOTT, DENOUNCES  
ARTICLE

REF: A. MUSCAT 852  
1B. MUSCAT 397

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Summary  
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11. (SBU) In separate meetings with Emboffs, Omani officials denounced a Jerusalem Post article alleging the application of the Arab League boycott in Oman. The government plans to respond formally to a Congressional inquiry on the matter, but will not comment publicly. End Summary.

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Reply to Congress Forthcoming  
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12. (SBU) Following the June 8 publication of an article in the Jerusalem Post allegedly quoting Omani customs officials as saying Oman still applies the Arab League boycott of Israel, Charge and Econoff called on Acting Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr al-Busaidi on June 12 to discuss next steps. Sayyid Badr, fully briefed on both the article and Representative Wexler's letter to the Sultan, replied that the Foreign Ministry is in the process of drafting a formal response to the Congressman's office, which would be transmitted via the Omani Embassy in Washington. This would be Oman's only response to the article, Sayyid Badr said.

13. (SBU) Sayyid Badr agreed that the article appeared to be the product of a journalistic ambush. Noting that he did not recognize the names of the Omani customs officials quoted in the article, Sayyid Badr discounted the alleged comments, even if they did occur, as coming from a low level. Furthermore, he found it strange that the Jerusalem Post would publish such an article, given the fact that Israeli government officials have never expressed dissatisfaction with trade ties to Oman. As recently as the June 6 Middle East Desalination Research Center (MEDRC) executive council meeting, visiting Israeli officials made no mention of boycott or trade concerns to him. He further recalled comments by Israeli Minister of Tourism on a recent international television broadcast dismissing the Arab League boycott as a thing of the past and completely irrelevant.

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No Boycott Here  
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14. (SBU) Econoff separately raised the Jerusalem Post article with the Ministry of Commerce's FTA point-person, Dr. Said al-Riyami, on June 10. Al-Riyami appeared unaware of the article, but quickly explained that the Ministry of Commerce and Industry has done everything it could to notify each Omani ministry about the non-applicability of the boycott. Al-Riyami stated that he would raise this concern with Commerce and Industry Minister Maqbool bin Sultan, but that the formal response would come from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

15. (SBU) Poloff spoke to a contact in Royal Oman Police Customs on June 10 who was well aware of the Jerusalem Post article and angrily rejected it as a fabrication. The contact knew that a journalist had called, but claimed the only reply offered was a referral of the caller to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.  
STEWART